

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**15 July 2018**

**Mark 6:14-29**

I have reviewed all the sermons I have preached on this Sunday since 2009. This Sunday comes every three years and it is always the same passage. People are confused about who Jesus of Nazareth is, and Herod has John the Baptist killed. Another customary feature of this Sunday is that it always falls at the end of the National Convention of the Episcopal Church. Reading those sermons, it is very apparent that I have been fairly frustrated on this Sunday for the last 9 years. I have decided that this year, I will just preach the Gospel and let God worry about his church today. In the Gospel of Mark we hear today that after a time of preaching, healing, and raising a young girl from the dead, "Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' Jesus has come to the attention of the royal house in Galilee, and everyone has an opinion about this mysterious itinerant preacher.

Is Jesus the Elijah returned who was announced by the prophet Malachi in 4:5-6? Is Jesus the great prophet like Moses, who was announced by Deuteronomy 18:15-20? Is Jesus the re-incarnated John the Baptist? The people had heard all these stories about the prophets of old and many believed that one of these prophets needed to return before the Messiah would appear. Ironically, many believed Jesus was such a prophet, but at this point in the narrative only a few disciples are willing to consider the idea that Jesus is the actual Messiah sent by God to liberate humanity. Jesus does not dispute the Biblical narrative about a great prophet preparing the way for the Messiah. In fact, Jesus affirms these Biblical traditions by connecting John the Baptist with Elijah. He says, "But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they chose to abuse him, just as the Scriptures predicted" (Mark 9:13, NLT).

We remain confused about this Jesus of Nazareth even today. After centuries of research and millions of pages written about Jesus, many in our world still don't know about this Jesus. Millions more have heard about Jesus and have dismissed him as utterly irrelevant for their lives, Millions more, who are able to recognize him as the Messiah and the Savior, still remain confused about

the full scope of what it means to be a disciple of this Jesus of Nazareth. I believe the Church itself has a hard time understanding who this Jesus is. Is he truly the way, the truth and the life? Is he Savior and Lord of the world, or is he Savior and Lord only of some Christians? Does Jesus have anything to tell our world today and if so where do we find this message? Do we find the message in the culture of the day, in the newest spiritual or self-help book, in our own experience and subjective understanding, in the latest social cause of our Church? Or, do we find it in the revealed Word of God in Holy Scripture? At heart, the question our Church is grappling with is “what exactly does Jesus expect from his disciples today and how do we accomplish his mission?”

The sad reality, my friends, is that as we we try to figure out who this Jesus is for the Church today, the Gospel retreats from Christian nations, secularism advances at a fast pace, and Jesus is sacrificed daily at the altar of pluralism. As we continue to try to understand who this Jesus is, our churches continue to look like ghost towns, where only the spirits of the dead come to visit us on Sunday Mornings. As we argue about the issue of the day, the world becomes more desperately secular and more isolated from God and from their neighbors. Perhaps we have entered a phase in our corporate life when we need to rediscover a radical and generous Orthopraxis to go along with a radical and generous Orthodoxy. In other words, perhaps we need to engage the world through generous practical ministries that answer the needs of people, at the very same time that we continue to preach the Gospel of Salvation in Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps the time has come for us to stop arguing about the latest issue of the day, and to start meeting our neighbors face to face. Perhaps the time has come for a re-discovery of who this Jesus of Nazareth is.

The English theologian A.W. Tozer once said, “We, who preach the gospel, must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, or the world of sports, or modern entertainment. We are not diplomats, but prophets; and our message is not a compromise, but an ultimatum” (“The Old Cross and the New”, as quoted by *The Biblical Evangelist*, November 1, 1991, p. 11.) The world is in desperate need of forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation. And this message needs to be preached with convincing words and with practical and loving service. I believe it is time to start preaching the Jesus revealed in Scripture, a Jesus who compels us to action and service. A Jesus radical in his love, obedient to the point of death, and willing to go to the cross to do for us that which we are unable to do for ourselves. Perhaps it is time for a return to the Holy Scriptures!

Jesus is Good news for the world, in the same way that he is good news for us. But, let me be very clear, He is good news not because he is a better way, but because he is the way. He is good news because he accepts us as sinners and is willing to die for us. He is good news not because he makes our lives easier, in fact the follower of Jesus may find himself in a dungeon, where he awaits his fate, while the young girl dances upstairs. Yet, even in the midst of suffering, Jesus Christ is good news because he remains on our side when the entire world seems to be against us. He is hope at times of hopelessness. He is salvation at times of captivity. He is redemption at times of slavery. He is the salvation that comes from outside of ourselves.

Salvation can never come from the inside, because it can never be located inside of ourselves. As a wise friend is fond of reminding me, "When within ourselves we don't find something above ourselves, we'll fall for what's around ourselves." Salvation can never be found within humanity, within our Church institutions, or within any philosophy of government. It is time we start teaching and preaching the Salvation that comes as a gift from God in the person of his Son. It is time our church rediscovers the salvation that comes from a garbage hill outside of Jerusalem, as a young man gasps for air and exclaims to the Father, "Forgive them for they know not what they are doing!"

I have great news for us today, my friends. Another National Convention has come and gone and Jesus of Nazareth remains the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. He remains the Savior of Humanity. He remains the only hope for the human race. He remains the only solution to the problem of sin. He is alive, he is risen, he is active, and is the Lord of the Church. And Christ remains supreme even if his supremacy was not affirmed by the consensus of National Convention. The supremacy of Christ is not dependent on the councils of the Church and for this I am most grateful!

Today I ask you again, "Who is this Jesus for you?" Think long and hard before you answer this question, because your very life rests in the balance,

May our Lord continue to bless you. Amen!